

Archbishop Lori's Homily - Christmas

Christmas

Immaculate Conception Church in Towson and Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland

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By Archbishop William E. Lori

Sometimes I think accessibility is the name of the game. You can't construct a new building without making it accessible to one and all. When we need a ride, we expect an Uber car to pick us up in a matter of minutes. When we go on the internet or use an app, we expect to access the information we need almost instantly. Access and accessibility have woven their way not only into our vocabulary but also into our way of thinking and our expectations.

So, let us ask: Is God accessible to us? Sometimes God is portrayed as an impersonal force incapable of relating to us. And sometimes God is seen as far removed from our everyday lives and struggles. Many people have concluded that the search for God is futile.

And then, on one of the longest, darkest, coldest nights of a difficult year, "...a child is born to us, and a son is given us..." (Isaiah 9:3). He is born in the poverty of a stable to the Virgin Mary as the faithful Joseph watched over them both with love, as the angels sang, and as the night sky was filled with light. For the child in the manger is the Eternal Son of God - "God from God, light from light, true God from true God."

This is how God the Father chose to make his Son and our Redeemer accessible to us: He sent his Son into the world to assume our humanity. This is God the Father's way of drawing close to us, of becoming accessible to us. So as the Son of God becomes one of us so as to enter human history, there are no armed guards, no

security, no need for an invitation. He is there for angels, shepherds and king alike. There was no room for him in the inn but there's room for us in the stable.

So as an initial take away from this Christmas Mass, let us resolve to put away the dusty old excuse that God is distant or that God does not care about us, or that God is absent from the world. In the humanity of Jesus, God has drawn very near to us. He knows us, loves us, and cares about us. With only a little coaxing on our part, with the merest invitation, the child in the manger will make his home in our hearts and fill them with joy.

Accessibility vs Convenience

Ah, how wonderful we say to ourselves. "With only a little coaxing, with an offhand invitation, the Lord will come to me. Yes, God has made himself accessible, endlessly available. So, I can call on God anytime I want and he will come – sort of like an Uber. When I'm sick, when I'm lonely, when things aren't going well, well, then is when I need God so I can just click on the 'God app' – and there he is! ...accessible and heartwarming, in the form of a little child.

And it's true: God is close at hand whenever we call him. Psalm 145 says "The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth" (145:18). The Book of Deuteronomy speaks of God's closeness to his people when it says, "For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call upon him" (Deut. 4:7)? Most of us call on God in our need and we should. Every day I bring a long list before the Lord in prayer and I'll bet you do the same. After all, the Lord himself taught us to ask for what we need: In the Our Father we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

But on this Christmas night when the Lord draws so close to us, we must not make the mistake of confusing accessibility with convenience. Ours is an accessible God, as we can see by peering into the stable at Bethlehem – ours is a God of mercy and a God who brings us many blessings – but not a mere god of convenience ... a quick and handy means to an end ... even if the end, the goal, we have in mind is something very good for ourselves, our loved ones, or society in general.

For the God who is accessible and answers our prayers often responds in ways that

are meant to engage us, challenge us, and purify us. And yes, God is utterly accessible to us in Christ Jesus but not a short cut either to our earthly aims and goals or to our eternal redemption. Actually, in coming among us, the Lord had something else in mind, something much more wonderful than dispensing occasional favors.

Accessible Friendship

Scripture teaches that the Word became flesh to make us partakers in the divine nature (John 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:4); and many ancient Christian writers taught that in Jesus the Son of God assumed our humanity so that we might share in his divinity (CCC 460). So when we behold the Christ Child in his manger or see in the smallness of the host the Body and Blood of Jesus, then let us realize that in Jesus, God came down to our level to raise us up to his level ... and then let us ask the Holy Spirit to fill us with wonder and awe. In Jesus, God has made himself utterly accessible to raise us up – out of sins, our isolation, our sadness, our smallness – to redeem us – so that we could become the friends of God in this life and in the life to come.

The Son of God became one of us to invite us, individually and collectively, to share in the love, the goodness, the joy he shared for all eternity in the Holy Spirit. Tonight the Lord seeks to touch the soul of each one of us with this love, to renew in us his invitation to be the friends of God and friends with one another in the church. This invitation is not issued only to those on the path to perfection – rather, as Jesus himself said, he came to call sinners among whom I am “Exhibit A.” The friendship Jesus is seeking to forge with each of us in the church is not casual or occasional or opportunistic – he loves us all the time and what he is asking of us this night is to love him in return – all the time – in much the same way as we love our life-long friends.

To help us share his friendship he gathered us into a church and gave the church the ways and means of drawing us closer to him and to each other, not because he imagined the members of his church would be perfect but because he knew we wouldn't be – becoming holy is messy work! As St. Paul says in his letter to Titus, Jesus gave himself to us “to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people as his own” (2:14).

In other words, the God who has gone to such lengths to make himself accessible want us to access his love, truth, goodness and mercy – not only in time of trouble and not only on a special day like Christmas – but all the time, day after day, Sunday after Sunday.

Conclusion

So, if Christmas has a bottom line, it must be this: God has made himself accessible to us. Will we make ourselves accessible to him? Let us, dear friends, in the grace and joy of this day resolve to make ourselves accessible, available to the Lord and to his love not only at Christmas but throughout the year. May you have a joyous Christmas and may God bless and keep you always in his love!